DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 824 FL 021 102

AUTHOR Hendrickson, James M.
TITLE Storytelling for Foreign Language Learners.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Instructional Materials (For Learner) (051) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; Cultural Context; Language Acquisition; Listening Comprehension; *Oral Language; Reading Aloud to Others; *Second Language Learning; *Story Telling

ABSTRACT

Telling and listening to stories is an ancient tradition that can benefit foreign language learners of all ages, languages, and levels of proficiency. Stories contain linguistic, paralinguistic, discourse, and cultural features that provide the comprehensible input and output that students need to develop their conversational skills. Instructors and students can select and tell stories that they enjoy and that interest their listeners. Some interactive story telling activities are presented, categorized as: Change the Story, Group Picture Story, Jigsaw Story, My Story, Oral Reading, Picture Stories, Psycho Story, Rumor, Shuffled Comics, Story Hour, Strip Story, and Tell Us a Story. Contains 33 references. (Author/LB)

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STORYTELLING FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Telling and listening to stories is an ancient tradition that can benefit foreign language learners of all ages, languages and levels of proficiency. Stories contain linguistic, paralinguistic, discourse and cultural features that provide the comprehensible input and output that students need to develop their conversational skills. Instructors and students can select and tell stories that they enjoy and that interest their listeners. This article concludes with a collection of many storytelling activities.

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Increasingly, theory and research in second language acquisition indicate that foreign language learners need considerable practice in listening comprehension, particularly in the early stages (Wintz and Reeds, 1973; Postovsky, 1974 and 1977; Olmstead Gary, 1975 and 1978; Dulay et al, 1982; Krashen, 1982 and 1987; Curtain, 1991). According to Krashen's theoretical model of second language acquisition (1982), students acquire a second language only when they are exposed to comprehensible input, which he defines as language that is "a little beyond" (i + 1) their current level of competence. Krashen states that as long as foreign language instructors continue to provide comprehensible input in the classroom, they are facilitating their students' natural language acquisition (p. 30).

An excellent vehicle for providing comprehensible input in the foreign language classroom is storytelling. Peck (1989) defines this art form and skill as "the oral interpretation of a traditional, literary, or personal experience story" (p. 138). Storytelling is not only a means of communication between storyteller and listener (Rosen, 1986, p. 231), but it is also a mutual creation between these two communicators (Baker and Greene, 1977). According to Studs Terkel, a veteran oral historian and master storyteller, "storytelling is a form of history, of immortality too. It goes on from one generation to another" (in Hoffer, 1991, p. 15).

STORYTELLING: AN ANCIENT TRADITION

The word "story," which originates from Latin historia, means "a connected narrative of important events especially of the remote past" (Webster, 1961). Telling stories is, of course, an ancient social tradition. As Pellowski (1990) eloquently explains in her book, The World of Storytelling, over thousands of years generations of people in all cultures have come together to listen to each other's stories. The first written record of a storytelling activity is found in an Egyptian document called the Westcar Papyrus. Dated sometime between 2000 and 1300 B.C., this papyrus tells how the sons of Cheops, the great builder of the pyramids in Egypt, entertained their father with stories. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Europe, the primary storytellers were Anglo-Saxon gleemen, Gallic bards, Norman minstrels, French troubadours, Irish ollams, and German minnesingers and Spielmänner. In early North American colonial times, as women would spin wool into yarn, they shared their stories with family and friends --hence the origin of the expression "spinning a yarn." In non-Western cultures, stories were passed from generation to generation by West African griots, South African ntsomi, Indian gurus, and Australian Aboriginals. Some of these stories have been transplanted to other parts of the world by Jewish storytellers. As Jews immigrated from one country to another, they carried with them stories borrowed from Africa and the Middle East, then transformed them into their own creations. Indeed, one frequently finds stories with similar plots and characters in widely different cultures. For example,

the story of Cinderella, which was first told in China, now has 750 variants told in many languages all over the world (Horn, p. 66).

In the United States today, storytelling is enjoying a major renaissance (Baker and Greene, 1977; Horn, 1987; Peck, 1989). Many colleges and universities have added courses in storytelling to their curricula in education, anthropology and folklore. Throughout the country, there is a growing number of professional storytellers for children and adults, along with a plethora of conferences, festivals, contests, classes, workshops, retreats, books, audiocassettes, videotapes, and other resource materials. Currently, there are more than 100 storytelling associations around the country, and over 50 storytelling festivals take place every year in America. There is even a National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS) located in Jonesborough, Tennessee.[1] Since its foundation in 1975, this nonprofit organization has been fostering the art of storytelling nationwide. NAPPS now boasts well over 7,000 members.

THE VALUE OF STORYTELLING

Lewis Carroll, the author of the famous story Alice in Wonderland, called stories "love gifts" (in Baker and Greene, p. 17). Indeed, telling stories is like giving a gift to others. It is an experience shared in an entertaining way. For Ross (1972), "...storytelling, in all its richness and variations, is, ultimately, a way for people to know themselves and to know others" (p. viii). "In the broadest sense, it is people's stories

that tell them the most about themselves. Stories become an important device individuals use to interpret to each other their experiences--experiences with work, school, a text, their families" (Sarris, 1990, p. 174).

Telling and listening to stories is beneficial for people of all ages. Pesola (1991) claims that storytelling is "one of the most powerful tools for surrounding the young learner with language" (p. 340). Stories also give emotional satisfaction to children and can help them cope with their psychic and intellectual growth (Pellowski, 1977, p. 178). Today, caretakers and instructors tell stories to help children develop communication skills, enhance creativity, gain self-confidence, improve social relationships, and better understand the world.

Storytelling is also a valuable tool for helping adolescents cope with life's difficulties. Psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists and members of the clergy tell stories to help adults confront anxieties, make better decisions, and to resolve moral dilemmas. Spiritual healers tell stories to mature audiences to cure afflictions of body and soul. For example, a recent conference, entitled "SACRED STORIES: Healing in the Imaginative Realm," was billed as a "one-of-a-kind gathering of artists, therapists and spiritual teachers," featuring Maya Angelou among other celebrities.

Of course, professional storytellers entertain people who simply enjoy listening to a good story. In the United States, for example, Jackie Torrence, the great-grandchild of slaves, tells Br'er Rabbit tales collected and published by Joel Chandler

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Harris over a century ago. Torrence claims that telling stories helps to preserve her African-American heritage as part of a collective ancestral memory (Martin, 1991). As she explains: "In Africa animals were used in folklore because the culture was a polite one. People used animals to tell the stories, and the animals took the place of humans. Br'er Rabbit's significance as the trickster has to do with the survival of African people in a brutal environment" (p. 28). Another popular American storyteller is Garrison Keillor, whose radio program, "A Prairie Home Companion," is broadcasted nationally every week via the American Radio Company. Keillor devotes about twenty minutes of the program telling stories to an adult audience about the fictional community of Lake Wobegon.

Foreign language learners can also benefit from storytelling. Listening to stories helps students develop their ability to understand the spoken language, become aware of cultural values different from their own, sharpen their memory skills, develop their ability to predict upcoming actions and events, and discriminate different story genres and storytelling styles. Telling stories provides opportunities for students to speak the foreign language creatively, to integrate information and knowledge they learned from other sources, and to become more self-confident in their ability to express themselves spontaneously.

INTRINSIC FEATURES OF STORIES

Linguistic, paralinguistic, discourse and cultural features blend together in stories, providing valuable comprehensible input that facilitates language acquisition.

Linguistic features. According to Halliday (1975), storytelling is one of the first and most productive uses of language. When students listen to stories they learn the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases through context, thereby expanding their lexical repertoire of idiomatic and colloquial expressions as well as slang, jargon, and other figurative language. The students also acquire a sense of how the grammatical features of a language communicate meaning. For example, when students of English as a Second Language listen to stories, they can learn how the simple present and present progressive tenses are sometimes used for the past narrative (e.g., "The cat climbs [climbed] up the tree, then the little boy goes climbing [climbed] after the cat.")

Paralinguistic features. A storyteller's gestures, facial expressions and body movements help listeners to understand a story and to acquire the language in which it is told. In addition, students learn that word stress can communicate various shades of meaning (e.g., "the white house" versus "the White House"), whereas intonation patterns convey many emotions such as suspense, surprise, grief and joy. As Bosma (1987) explains, "Even before children can produce the words, as listeners they can sense the music of language" (p. 1).

Discourse features. All stories contain a variety of discourse attributes that aid comprehension and facilitate language acquisition. For instance, chronological organization and sequential cues help students connect the events and actions in a story. Redundancy aids the clarification and recall of key concepts, and it enhances students' ability to predict logical outcomes. Use of dialogue helps listeners interpret imagery within the story context. And natural pauses in telling a story help students process the meaning of what they hear.

Cultural features. Storytelling is an excellent way to teach students about the target culture and to understand how it functions. Through stories they can learn about the lives of historical people and events, the names of geographical locations, dialectal variations, as well as the local customs, traditions and values of the target language community.

SELECTING A STORY

Perhaps the most important element in good storytelling is finding the right story to tell (Bauer, p. 48). First, storytellers should choose a story that they like. A story makes a statement about the teller; it reveals something about his or her individual character. Secondly, one should select a story that would appeal to one's listeners, preferably a story that is important to their lives. The storyteller needs to consider the listeners' ages, educational backgrounds, personal interests, as well as their level of listening proficiency in the foreign language. A good story also includes a clearly-defined theme,

believable characters, and a well-developed plot that gradually unfolds, maintains suspense, builds to a climax and ends, leaving the listeners satisfied. The storyteller can choose from a wide variety of stories that have been handed down by word of mouth or appeared originally in writing.

Stories of the oral tradition are folktales such as cumulative tales that have a repetitive rhythm and a minimum of plot, animal stories that deal with talking animals who have recognizable human characteristics, and how-and-why tales that explain cultural phenomena. One could also choose yarns of heroes and ghosts or ancient myths which "represent the attempts of primitive people to explain the nature of the world around them and human existence" (Bauer, p. 121). And, of course, the storyteller could narrate personal experiences such as recollections and anecdotes.

In the written tradition, one could choose to tell well-known sagas or legends that revolve around people who may have actually lived or incidents that are believed to have taken place. There are also fables which are "short, didactic tales which attempt to teach a lesson or convey a moral" (Bauer, p. 121). The main characters of fables are animals who behave like humans such as those in Aesop's Fables in Greek, La Fontaine's fables in French, and Krylov's fables in Russian. Storytellers can also choose to tell biblical parables, adventure and romance stories, as well as chunks of novels, condensed versions of epic fantasy tales, lyric poems, and nursery rhymes. Finally, one could choose to sing ballads which are short stories told in

song. Ballads usually include a difficult situation that is resolved at the end. An example of a ballad in Hispanic culture is the Mexican narrative folksong called a **corrido**. The word **corrido** originates from Spanish **correr** which means "to run" or "to flow" because the **corrido** is sung simply and swiftly without embellishments (Parades, 1958, p. xi).

TELLING THE STORY

The art of storytelling is an exercise in creating meaning and communicating that meaning in ways that touch the lives of listeners. According to Rosen (1986), "to tell a story is to formulate an interlocking set of meanings; to listen to one is in its turn an active search for the teller's meaning via one's own; to retell a story is also to do just that because listening is a kind of retelling" (p. 231).

The following guidelines are designed to help instructors and students to tell stories in the foreign language classroom. It is essential that the storyteller know the story well by listening to it or reading it several times. Begin by thinking about the setting of the story: the location and time it takes place, the weather conditions, the smells, the sounds. Be aware of the structure of the story and how its components interconnect to reveal a plot. Map the story by breaking it down into major segments such as the introduction, the main body, and the conclusion.

Next, think about the story's characters, what they look like and how they interact with each other. Try to choose key

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phrases in the story that you would like to emphasize. Say these phrases aloud to yourself with appropriate intonation, depending on their place in the story. Plan and practice gestures which help listeners understand the story. Practice telling the entire story before a mirror using appropriate props, facial expressions, body language, and sound effects judiciously. Avoid speaking too fast, too slowly, too softly or in a high-pitched voice. Then tell the story to a colleague, friend or family member and ask for their constructive criticism. Use plenty of eye contact with your listeners. Instructors should time the story to be sure it fits well into their lesson plan. The storyteller could also record the story on audiotape or videotape, then play it back for self-critique.

Some storytellers prefer to stand before their audience while telling a story (more formal), and others choose to sit with their listeners (more informal). Storytellers signal the beginning of the storytelling session in different ways. Some simply state the title of the story, while others begin by playing a specific piece of music to establish a relaxed atmosphere and to set the appropriate mood for the story. Story time for children might begin by the lighting of a wish candle. Once the candle is lit, no one is permitted to speak except the storyteller. At the end of the story, the children make a silent wish, and the storyteller blows out the candle.

Three effective formats for telling stories in the foreign language classroom are traditional storytelling, story reading, and interactive storytelling.

Traditional storytelling. Many storytellers use a wide variety of visual props to help their listeners understand meaning. These props include chalkboards, flannel or feltboards, magnetic boards, flip cards, paper rolls, overhead transparencies, puppets, slides and filmstrips. For example, James Gullerud (1991), a professor of Latin at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, shows slides of star constellations to tell stories to his students who come with various backgrounds and interests in astronomy, astrology, religion and mythology.

Story reading. Reading familiar stories aloud to students of a foreign language "permits them to head and attend to a significant amount of cohesive literary language. These stories can be an important source of linguistic input" (Allen and Allen, 1985, p. 690). Storytellers who choose this format should be sure to read the story aloud several times to themselves before reading it in class in order to rehearse how they wish to tell it.

Interactive storytelling. Trousdale (1990) regards storytelling as a cooperative venture which is "always enjoyable but not always predictable" (p. 165). She has students tell a story together in pairs, much like parents do with their children. The storyteller could also begin telling a story, then ask the listeners to interact with it by elaborating on incidents, incorporating characters and information from other sources, and varying the plot.

INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING ACTIVITIES

The author has used the storytelling activities described below with instructors and students of many world languages. Several of the activities have appeared in professional journals and have been modified and refined. Each activity is listed in alphabetical order and includes its title, the level of language proficiency required according to the scale developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), necessary materials, step-by-step procedures, follow-up activities (where appropriate), and the activity's source.

Change the Story (Advanced)

Materials: A short story in the foreign language.

Procedure: The students listen to the story, then they are asked to create a new story by changing the original one in some way. They may retell it from the perspective of one of the characters, from a different time frame, or with a different ending. (Omaggio, 1986, p. 210).

Group Picture Story (Advanced)

Materials: Several magazine pictures that depict people in odd situations or show several people speaking with each other. The more interesting the situation or the more ambiguous it is, the better. Mount the pictures on construction paper and affix a sheet of lined paper to the back.

Procedure: Distribute the pictures to groups of three to five students, one picture to a group. The students look at the

picture and brainstorm for a few minutes to create as many possible questions as the picture can provide. A group leader may be chosen to write down the questions on the line sheet, or the picture and writing task can be passed from student to student as each thinks of a question to ask. After the groups have generated their set of questions, collect them (as well as the pictures to which they are attached), and redistribute them, each one to a different group. Group members then read the question associated with their new picture, and agree on a story that will answer all of the questions asked. They must recount their story in the past, making sure that the narrative is coherent and complete enough to answer all the questions. (Omaggio, 1986, p. 203).

Jigsaw Story (Intermediate Through Advanced)

Materials: A chalkboard and chalk or an overhead projector, a transparency and a transparency pen.

Procedure: The instructor asks students for various elements that they will use to invent a group story. For example, the instructor says: "Give me the name of a woman, a number, an animal, a color, a kind of food, a drink, a city, a time." The instructor writes the students' suggestions on the chalkboard or on the transparency. Then the students invent a story in the foreign language using these elements. (Graham, 1992)

My Story (Intermediate through Advanced)

Materials: One object brought by each student (see Procedure below).

Procedure: The instructors ask the students to bring to class an object that they associate with a story from their life. At the next class meeting, the students place their objects on a table. Then they all look at the objects and try to imagine what stories are associated with the objects. After all the students sit down, ask one student to choose an object other than his or her own. The student to whom that object belongs stands up, takes the object, and tells his or her story in the foreign language. With a large class, have students form small groups (Graham, 1992).

Oral Reading (Advanced through Superior)

Materials: A very short, interesting story told in short sentences, stick figures depicting the story's characters, a magnetic chalkboard and magnets, or a feltboard to which the stick figures can adhere.

Procedure: The instructor reads aloud the story slowly while placing the appropriate stick figures to help convey meaning. The instructor reads the story again and points to the appropriate figures. The students repeat each line of the story several times. Then the instructor points to each figure as the students retell the story. Ask for several volunteers to retell the story once again. Then the class divides into small groups to rehearse the story and to perform it in their own words.

Follow-up: After the role play, the students can retell the story in writing, then hand in their stories to be corrected by the instructor (in Hendrickson, 1983, p. 275).

Picture Stories (Intermediate through Advanced)

Materials: A picture story with at least three panels or a complex picture.

Procedures: Distribute one picture story or complex picture to each student. Students work in pairs or small groups of 3=5 members. They tell a story in the foreign language, using their picture or set of pictures to guide them.

Follow-up: If students have worked together in pairs, the partners could join another pair. Student A in each pair retells his or her partner's story to the group; then Students B do likewise (in Hendrickson, 1980, p. 740).

Psycho Story (Intermediate to Advanced)

Materials: None.

Procedure: The students form groups of 3-4 members. Each group member tells a story based on the same plot as follows: 1) You are walking in the woods, 2) you come to some water, 3) you find a key, 4) you come to a barrier. The storyteller must elaborate how he or she feels at each stage of the plot as well as what he or she does. After all the group members have told their stories, the instructor reveals the following interpretation: woods = general philosophy of life, water = attitude toward sex, key = perspective of success; barrier = viewpoint of death. (Source unknown)

Rumor (Beginning through Advanced)

Materials: None.

Procedure: Students sit in groups of 3-5 members. One student begins to tell a story by saying the first sentence in it. Then the next person continues the story by saying a second sentence that relates to the first sentence. The story continues until the group finds an appropriate ending (in Hendrickson, 1980, 743).

Shuffled Comics (Intermediate through Advanced)

Materials: A comic strip that contains at least three panels, each of which has a speech balloon. Block out the words in the balloon with typing correction fluid, cut out each panel of the comic strip, paste it on a 3 X 5 index card, then shuffle the panels.

Procedure: Group students according to the number of panels contained in the comic strip. Give one panel to each student who tells the group what the characters in his or her panel are doing. The students may not show their panels to any member of their group. The group task is to reassemble the comic strip into its original sequence, using only the foreign language.

Follow-up: For additional oral practice, the students can role play the situation and characters in the comic strip (in Hendrickson, 1983, p. 275).

Story Hour (Intermediate-Mid through Superior)

Materials: Sets of 10-15 index cards with a different verb written in its infinitive form on each card.

Procedure: Students form groups of 4-6 members and sit in a circle. One student in each group shuffles the verb deck, then places it face down in the middle of the circle. Another student draws the top card and uses the verb on it in the past tense as the first line in a story. The second student draws the next card and continues telling the story, using the verb on the card. The activity proceeds in this manner until all students in each group have contributed to the story which ends either logically or when all the verb cards have been used.

Follow-up: Give each student a set of verb cards. Ask the students to write a story in the past tense using all the verbs on the cards in any order (in Hendrickson, 1983, p. 273).

Strip Story (Novice-High through Advanced)

Materials: One or more stories containing the same number of lines as the number of students in each small group. Each story should consist of 5-8 sentences of no more than 10 words per sentence. Type each line of the story, then make several copies of it. Cut one copy into strips, each containing one sentence.

Procedure: Group the students according to the number of strips contained in a given story. Randomly give each group member a strip containing a sentence from the story. The students may not show their strips to any other student. They read over their strips, look up unfamiliar words, and receive any necessary help on pronunciation from the instructor. Then the group begins to piece together the story, using only the foreign language.

Follow-ups:

1. Students can role play the story with the other students, prompting the "actors" from individual strips.
2. Each student can dictate his or her strip, in story order, to the rest of the class until the whole story has been told.
3. One student can change the story into reported speech and retell the story to the class (Gibson, 1975).

Tell Us a Story (Intermediate through Advanced)

Materials: A story from a book or magazine or a familiar story from the target culture.

Procedure: Give students a vocabulary list of key phrases from the story or write them on the chalkboard. Tell the story once, then ask students questions to check their comprehension. Then tell the story again, making some factual changes in it. Ask the students to stop you and correct each change, then continue retelling the story (in Hendrickson, 1983, p. 280).

CONCLUSION

The inherent purpose of storytelling is to communicate information. Consequently, it appears to be an ideal vehicle for providing comprehensible input that facilitates the natural process of language acquisition. A great deal of research is needed, however, to investigate the cognitive and affective effects of storytelling in the foreign language classroom. The author hopes that this article will provide seminal ideas for such research as well as practical techniques that instructors and students can experiment with in their classes.

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[1]For more information about this organization, contact: NAPPS, P.O. Box 309, Jonesborough, TN 37659; telephone: (800) 525-4514 or (615) 753-2171.

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